

South Amboy looking for bids on ferry project's next phase

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By mid-2012, ferries should once again carry hundreds of commuters between the city and lower Manhattan, creating another incentive for people to buy homes and shop around South Amboy, city Business Administrator Camille Tooker said.

About five years after operators suspended ferry service across Raritan Bay to and from South Amboy because of construction hazards and economic concerns, a project designed to improve access to and parking for the planned ferry service is entering its final stages.

South Amboy announced on Feb. 24 that it is advertising for bids for the third of four phases in the ferry project. The third phase, the Radford Ferry Road Extension, involves building a 900-foot road from the Main Street Bridge to the water. Also as part of the third phase, contracts are expected to be awarded to companies to oversee archaeological finds around the historic railroad at the construction site, and to perform environmental remediation, Tooker said.

The first two phases -- building an access road, and then building the bridge -- are complete. The final stage involves constructing the ferry terminal. Officials said an experienced ferry service operator has signed a letter of intent to run the service, but they did not identify it. Officials previously said the city was in talks with New England Fast Ferry.

"The fourth and final phase will be the construction of the ferry terminal itself, which will bring an experienced operator to our city," Mayor Fred A. Henry said in a news release.

The ferry project, funded with tens of millions of federal dollars, has created jobs for companies, Henry said. For instance, Stavola, a contracting company with an asphalt plant in Old Bridge, received more than \$2.3 million to complete an earlier phase of the Radford Ferry Road Construction Project.

The city had ferry service from February 2002 through May 2006. In 2005, SeaStreak pulled out citing lower-than-expected ridership and rising fuel costs. New York Water Taxi took over but suspended service several months later.

Tooker said that the ferry service started operating under less-than-ideal conditions, and that it opened sooner than planned to aid commuters after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"We were operating from a site that was less than desirable with regard to the parking facilities," Tooker said. "Even then, there were many people that were using the ferry."

She said the ferry service can "boost the marketability of the town."